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ABSTRACT

The American Historical Association's (AHA) involvement in Faculty Development Programs (FDP) in history instruction is described. The purpose of FDP is to improve teaching as part of a continuing process. AHA guidelines recommend that these programs be initiated and supported by AHA under the following conditions: (1) a regional confederation of schools and colleges should assume joint sponsorship of faculty development programs; (2) each workshop should focus clearly on a specific teaching problem; (3) there must be an identifiable clientele of experts and participants; (4) systematic efforts to disseminate the results of such workshops to the historical profession are to be planned in advance; and (5) representatives of the Committee on Teaching and other appropriate AHA bodies must be involved in the initial planning and in conducting an assessment of the program's effectiveness. Based on the results of the Long Island faculty development program, the AHA has learned that FDPs cannot be imposed from an outside source. Other lessons of importance concern the value of interinstitutional cooperation and of local institutional funding if the project is going to succeed. Building upon the Long Island model, the AHA will develop five or six regional centers for faculty development. Each center will reflect the underlying philosophy of the program and will also mirror the particular interests, strengths, and problems of the region and institutions involved. (Author/DE)

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The AHA and Faculty Development

A talk delivered at the Annual Meeting
by Mack Thompson

December 28, 1975

I. Background

According to a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (November 3, 1975), "'Faculty development' has become one of the most popular new catch-phrases in American higher education." The current pressure to improve the quality of instruction comes from a variety of sources, from the job market and decreased faculty mobility, and from a sense of dissatisfaction on the part of teachers, students, administrators and legislators. As a result, programs focusing on teaching have developed on more than 400 college campuses. A newsletter on faculty development programs has recently begun publication and a variety of foundations have shown support for the projects with generous grants.

II. What Has Been the AHA's Involvement in These Efforts?

The AHA's interest in teaching predates the establishment of a Teaching Division by the new constitution. Indeed, since 1896, a series of different association committees have engaged in activities designed to promote the improvement of history instruction. During the 1960's when outside funding was readily available, the AHA simultaneously had a Committee on Teaching in the Schools (concerned with pre-college instruction), an Advisory Committee on the History Education Project, a Committee on Undergraduate Teaching, a Committee on the Feature Film Project, and a Committee on PhD Programs in History.

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Each of these committees viewed teaching as a large part of its mission. Leaner years have forced a consolidation of these efforts, but the establishment of a Teaching Division "to collect and disseminate information about the training of teachers and about instructional techniques and materials and to encourage excellence in the teaching of history in the schools, colleges, and universities," reaffirms the AHA's interest in teaching.

AHA involvement in what are now popularly called "faculty development programs," that is, concerted programs of a group of teachers to improve teaching as part of a continuing process, is of more recent origin. One of the last actions of the old appointed Committee on Teaching in 1973 was to recommend AHA support for a faculty development program on Long Island and to establish a set of guidelines for future AHA efforts in this area. Adopted by the Council on December 27, 1973, the guidelines recommend that programs be initiated and supported by the AHA under the following conditions:

- a. A regional confederation of schools and colleges should assume joint sponsorship and active management.
- b. Each workshop should focus clearly on a specific teaching problem, for example, the motivation of marginally prepared and at best moderately interested students.
- c. There must be an identifiable clientele of experts and participants.
- d. Systematic efforts to disseminate the results of such workshops to the historical profession are to be planned for in advance.
- e. Representatives of the Committee on Teaching and other appropriate AHA bodies must be involved in the initial planning and in conducting an assessment of the program's effectiveness.

An additional assumption on the part of the AHA has been that there is justification for stressing content as well as methods and that faculty development programs developed along disciplinary lines (rather than programs teaching skills to teachers in all disciplines) have a focus that makes them especially effective.

III. Lessons of the Stony Brook Project

Charles Hoffman will speak in considerable detail about the Long Island faculty development project and the lessons which the project directors and participants have learned. Since the project was conceived of as a pilot effort and as a model for similar programs in future years, I will comment more generally on what the association has learned about faculty development from the project, and where we plan to go from here.

For persons unfamiliar with the project, the Long Island Faculty Development Program involved teams of highly motivated history teachers from SUNY, Stony Brook, Nassau Community College, Suffolk Community College (two campuses), and SUNY Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale. Participating as a "community of peers," these teachers developed a program that included an intensive summer workshop in May-June 1974 and the development of a Long Island History and Social Science Consortium to coordinate activities and to assure adequate follow-up support for the projects initiated by the program. The report of the AHA evaluators was published in full in the September 1975 AHA Newsletter, and it testifies to the success and to the great difficulties accompanying projects of this sort.

The Long Island experience solidly demonstrates the wisdom of the guidelines adopted in 1973.

Several features of the Long Island Faculty Development Project have a special interest for the AHA as a whole and for future faculty development efforts. We have learned a number of valuable things, not the least of which is the extraordinary amount of time, effort and commitment on the part of the project directors and participants that is necessary to begin a process of change and improvement of teaching. The project's original director, William Taylor, the associate director, George Schuyler, and the present director, Charles Hoffman, deserve special recognition and thanks for their contributions to the program. While the support of a national organization can provide assistance in a variety of ways, such as developing guidelines for programs, identifying and recruiting personnel, securing outside funding, administering grants, and disseminating information about the project to a national audience, the real work of the project, and its success or failure, rests with the participants. Faculty development programs cannot be imposed from an outside source, their success requires the full support and cooperation of the participants.

A second lesson of considerable importance is the value of inter-institutional cooperation, especially of cooperation between historians teaching at different types of institutions. The evaluation team for the Long Island project noted that the program was successful in establishing good communication among faculty at the participating institutions, especially between two and four-year college faculty.

And, they note, "With this communication goes, of course, increased professional respect, an awareness of each others problems, and the potential for getting at a number of those problems insofar as they are institutional or capable of being met by interinstitutional exchange." The rapid growth of community colleges and the fact that many students receive all or a major portion of their studies in history at community colleges increases the need for developing effective channels of communication between historians in four year colleges and universities and their colleagues in community and junior colleges. We believe that faculty development efforts can facilitate this development.

The AHA believes that professional associations have talent and experience which, if properly channeled, will contribute much to the improvement of teaching. But, we are convinced that it is no longer enough for individuals or even single institutions to try to work out new strategies of teaching and learning for themselves. Revitalizing the teaching of history will involve thought, effort, inventiveness, and a concerted effort to bring together historians in all segments of higher education. A coordinated response involving two and four-year institutions as well as national organizations seems far more likely to bring results. Such a response shares the ideas and experiences of many different individuals and institutions and helps them to combine resources to achieve better quality and more efficient education.

The Long Island project has also demonstrated how crucial it is

to arouse the sort of enthusiasm and support for faculty development that can generate local funding of the efforts once the initial outside funds are spent. Participating institutions must be willing to provide their share of the financial support to sustain the activities of the institution's participants and to strengthen the institution's commitments to faculty development. The Long Island project has taught us that securing local institutional funding is an arduous, time-consuming process, yet it is possible. We have also learned how quickly such programs can be threatened by retrenchment.

Building upon the Long Island model, the AHA is now working to develop a national program that will apply the lessons gained from this faculty development project. We are seeking to support a national program which will reduce academic isolation, impart new teaching skills, promote institutional cooperation, and encourage integrated reforms among colleges and universities in several regions of the country. We are eager to guide and coordinate the development of a number of regional programs with the goal of achieving continuous faculty development efforts as an integral part of higher education in each region upon termination of AHA support. Specifically, we expect that the AHA will be able to facilitate the development of five or six regional centers for faculty development, and we are soliciting detailed proposals for faculty development consortia. Each regional center will reflect the underlying philosophy of the program (the emphasis on interinstitutional cooperation, the focus on the discipline of history, for example), and will also mirror the particular interests, strengths and problems of the region and/or institutions involved. It is expected that one center might focus on a

common interest in media in teaching, another might emphasize the use of local resources, another might encourage the development of quantitative skills and approaches to teaching, and yet another might try to bring together history teachers in high schools as well as community colleges and universities.

At its meeting this fall, the Committee on Teaching helped to identify persons and institutions who might well be interested in forming the nucleus of regional faculty development centers. These persons have been contacted and invited to prepare preliminary proposals that would be part of a larger proposal for a national effort. I will be meeting with some of these persons during the Annual Meeting.

I have been encouraged by the amount of interest that has been expressed in efforts to improve history teaching and in regional faculty development centers. For example, the Buffalo Community Studies Group at SUNY, Buffalo has suggested that the group serve as initiator of a center composed of faculty from area institutions who share an interest in the Buffalo community as a subject for research and teaching. The University of Illinois and Illinois State University have suggested the possibility of working with the community colleges in the state of Illinois to develop a center. At the University of Delaware, which has been developing a variety of media programs in recent years, there is interest in a center in which the current media projects serve as a basis for faculty development. At the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research at the University of Michigan, there is an interest in a faculty development center which emphasizes quantitative approaches to history.

We are eager to hear from other institutions that are willing to work with the AHA in developing a network of faculty development centers along the lines I have suggested this morning, and I hope that anyone interested in this will discuss it with me. The Stony Brook experiment, by demonstrating the efficacy of an integrated, inter-institutional approach to the improvement of teaching has led the way for a full scale assault on many of the problems facing teachers of history. Since the national project is still in formative stages, I welcome comments and suggestions on ways that we may make it most effective.